

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PN
SUBJECT: LIBERALS OPT OUT OF OPPOSITION FRONT

REF: (A) PANAMA 4719, (B) PANAMA 4897

1. AFTER MUCH SOUL-SEARCHING, PANAMA'S LIBERAL PARTY HAS DECIDED TO STAY OUT OF A "UNIFIED OPPOSITION" FORMED BY OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES AND LED BY PANAMENISTA PARTY PRESIDENT ARNULFO ARIAS. IN A DAY-LONG MEETING ON JULY 9, THE DIRECTORS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY VOTED NOT TO JOIN THE UNION IN A VOTE OF 35 AGAINST, 17 IN FAVOR, AND 2 ABSTENTIONS.

2. EXPLAINING THE LIBERALS' ACTION, A SPOKESMAN STATED THAT THE PARTY WILL COOPERATE WITH THE UNIFIED FRONT LED BY ARIAS AND THAT ITS INTENT IS NOT TO DIVIDE THE OPPOSITION AGAINST THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, HE WENT ON, THE PARTY IS NOT MAKING A "DEAL" WITH THE GOVERNMENT. RATHER, THE LIBERAL PARTY WANTS TO ENTER INTO A DIALOG WITH THE CURRENT
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REGIME, TOGETHER WITH THE OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES, TO WORK OUT A COMPROMISE ON NATIONAL PROBLEMS.

3. THIS DECISION ON THE PART OF THE LIBERALS REFLECTS A CONTINUING HOLD ON THE PARTY BY ITS PRESIDENT DAVID SAMUDIO, SR., WHO WAS UNANIMOUSLY RE-ELECTED PRESIDENT AT THE JULY 9 MEETING. IN THE

FACE OF SUBSTANTIAL OPPOSITION WITHIN HIS PARTY, SAMUDIO HAD LONG HELD OUT FOR KEEPING THE LIBERALS AT A DISTANCE FROM ARIAS AND THE PANAMENISTAS. BELIEVING THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD BE PRESSURED INTO TAKING STEPS TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION, HE HOPED THAT AN ALLIANCE WITH ARIAS WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY TO THAT END. WITH TORRIJOS NOW TALKING MORE ABOUT GOVERNMENT REFORM (REF B), SAMUDIO EVIDENTLY WAS ABLE TO CARRY THE DAY WITHIN HIS PARTY. TORRIJOS' RECENT INDICATIONS IN FAVOR OF REFORM MAY WELL HAVE BEEN JUST ENOUGH (AND JUST IN TIME) TO KEEP THE LIBERALS OUT OF ARNULFO'S EMBRACE.

4. AS PART OF ITS OWN OPPOSITION EFFORT, THE LIBERAL PARTY ISSUED A STATEMENT OUTLINING TEN FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IT SEES AS ESSENTIAL TO REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY, INCLUDING SUCH POINTS AS DIRECT ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT AND LAW-MAKING BODY, AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY, THE GUARANTEE OF THE WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS, A PROHIBITION AGAINST IMPOSING EXILE, THE LEGALIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EFFECTIVE AUTONOMY FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA. THE DECLARATION RECOMMENDED THAT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS BE DRAWN UP AND DISCUSSED WITH OPPOSITION REPRESENTATIVES AT ONCE, A REFERENCE TO TORRIJOS' EARLIER PLEDGE TO CREATE A "HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION" LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL POLITICAL SECTORS TO STUDY AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLITICAL REFORM (REF B). JORDEN

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